

National Cultural Policy Submission

Emeritus Professor Peter McPhee, History Council of Victoria

Submitted: On behalf of an arts peak body; On behalf of an organisation with arts-components (e.g. community organisation, tourism, venue, health, education etc).

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

Strong Institutions

The History Council of Victoria (HCV), one of four State History Councils, welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the review of National Cultural Policy. Its vision is to connect Victorians with history and to inspire engagement with the past, their identity and the world today. The HCV champions the value of history about any place, any person, any period.

The Council is the peak body for history in the State, with the objective of furthering historical literacy and awareness and inspiring public engagement with the past, their identity and the world today: education for citizenship in the deepest sense. The council includes representatives from cultural and educational institutions and heritage bodies; history teachers and curriculum advisors; academic and professional historians; and community history organisations.

The Council provides lectures to senior secondary school students from university subject specialists, monthly seminars available to the public, prizes to encourage the teaching of First Nations History and leadership in advocacy of history and is a major information network for individuals and groups.

Writing history is generally excluded from definitions of 'creative practice' unless it happens to be historical fiction. This means that organisations like ours, or like the many thousands of community historical societies and museums, often cannot access the funding that is made available to other organisations like community artists or galleries, putting local historical knowledge and collections at risk. We believe cultural policy should include reference to history as an essential contributor to a strong and inclusive Australian culture and to an awareness both of who we are as Australians and of how we came to be.

Reaching the AudienceAs the peak body for history, the HCV has both 'outward-looking' roles (including advocacy and representation to government and the wider community, public programs, community education) and 'inward-looking' roles (including information dissemination, and networking between members). Financial support for these dual roles is an imperative for us.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

In a Victorian and Australian context, respect for and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage and knowledge must be at the heart of historical awareness. Our **Value of History** statement (https://www.historycouncilvic.org.au/value_of_history), argues that "History lays the groundwork for strong, diverse and inclusive communities that are vital places to live and work. Communities are wrapped in human memory: Indigenous knowledge, family stories, oral histories, social customs, cultural collections, heritage and civic commemorations. These all strengthen our connections and

commitment to one another. History supports a sense of community identity and place; and that in turn promotes social cohesion, individual and collective wellbeing, and resilience.”

A Place for Every Story

The vision of the HCV is to connect Victorians with history and to inspire engagement with the past, their identity and the world today. The HCV recognises that history can be written about any place, any person, any period. In a multicultural society, it is essential that we recognise the plurality of the histories that are inseparable from the identities of Australian citizens. The Gillard Government’s 2012 document was launched hand-in-hand with the *Australia in the Asian Century* white paper and this revised NCP should fit in with the Albanese Government’s ‘reset’ of foreign policy.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

The HCV, with similar bodies, has expressed its concern in recent years about the impact of financial stringencies on major public institutions, including the National Archives, the National Library and the archives division of the ABC. We have also expressed our deep concern about the continued threats to unique and invaluable First Nations heritage sites. We would welcome a revised National Cultural Policy that would strengthen the national commitment to institutions and policies that recognise and protect the national estate in its broadest meaning: those institutions (including community history bodies like ours), material objects and sites that have responsibilities to preserve the nation’s heritage for the public good.